

INTERRACIAL REVIEW

A JOURNAL FOR CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY



REHOUSING THE NEGRO IN NEW YORK

Franklin O. Nichols

.

NEGRO HOUSING IN NEW ORLEANS

Herman A. Washington

.

HITLER AND THE NEGRO

J. A. Rogers

.

HIS FATHER'S BUSINESS

Edward E. Best

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April, 1940

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INTERRACIAL REVIEW

April - 1940

Vol. XIII No. 4

Christian Democracy

Christian Democracy rejects artificial inequalities due to racial myths, material greed or physical violence and recognizes only such accidental inequalities as necessarily accompany human life at all times and in all places.

As the objective of the Catholic interracial program, we define Christian Democracy as a society in which the God-given dignity and destiny of every human person is full recognized, in laws, government, institutions and human conduct.

POSTULATES

- The Catholic Interracial Program has a twofold aim: (1) the combating of race prejudice; (2) the attainment of social justice for the whole social group regardless of race.
- "Nothing does more harm to the progress of Christianity and is more against its spirit than . . . race prejudice amongst Christians. — There is nothing more widely spread in the Christian world."
— Jacques Maritain
- "From the evidence on hand today, we cannot scientifically prove that the Nordic or the Negro are superior or inferior, one to the other."
— Rev. John M. Cooper
- The interracial problem is the greatest world problem of today. It is the major threat to international peace. In America the interracial problem is one of grave national concern. It is perhaps the biggest problem confronting the Catholic Church in America.
- "Intolerance towards Negroes in the United States is perhaps the acme of the racial intolerance of modern nationalism."
— Carlton J. H. Hayes
- The spiritual aspect of the Catholic interracial program flows from the common membership of all races in the Mystical Body of Christ and the common expression of this unity in the Church's liturgy.
- Prejudice on the part of Catholic laity is a barrier to the conversion of the Negro and a trial to the new found Faith of the Negro convert.
- "We must concede that the natural rights of the Negro are identical in number and sacredness to the rights of white persons."
— Rev. Francis J. Gilligan, S.T.D.
- Catholic principles maintaining the equality of all men and upholding the sanctity of the Negro's natural rights, impose upon all Catholics a rule of conduct which must be followed, regardless of any temporary inconveniences, apprehensions or difficulties that may be encountered.

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INTERRACIAL REVIEW

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The Interracial Field

INTERESTING STATISTICS

Number of Negroes in U. S.	13,000,000
Estimated Number of Protestant Negroes ..	5,000,000
Estimated Number of Catholic Negroes	300,000
Estimated Number Unchurched	7,750,000
Number of Negroes Attending Colleges	23,038
Number of Catholic Negro Churches	221
Number of Catholic Negro Schools	263
Negro Enrollment in Catholic Schools	35,026
Priests Engaged in Colored Missions	300
Sisters Engaged in Colored Missions	1,100
Negroes in New York City	327,726
Negroes in Chicago	233,000
Negroes in Philadelphia	219,000
Negroes in Washington	132,068

The Negro

"The solution of the economic, social, and political problems of the Negro American will tax the ingenuity of the leaders of both the white and colored races, working together without prejudice or bias and looking only to the welfare of our common country.

"This solution will never be made purely on a humanitarian basis. Only in the light of Christian justice and charity will the Negro take his rightful place in the American order. Only Christian justice, charity, and education can dissipate the clouds of race prejudice, hatred and injustice.

"In our day many voices are heard proclaiming the need of social justice and urging Catholic Action. Restricted social justice is nothing but selfishness, and Catholic Action bound by fetters of race hatred or prejudice is really un-Catholic. Christ gave Himself as a redemption for all. He did that all might live. He set up love as the symbol which would distinguish His followers. The first and the greatest law, He tells us, is to love God above all things. The second, which is a complement of the first, is: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'

"Our neighbor is every man, everyone made to the image and likeness of God and deemed worthy by Christ to be redeemed through His Blood. If each individual Catholic would realize this, and realizing it, manifest the charity and justice of Christ toward all men, one angle of the colored problem would be well on the way toward solution—the religious angle, to which we individual Catholics have contributed."

—Rev. Thomas A. Meehan, in "The New World."

This Month and Next

This month FRANKLIN O. NICHOLS, Chairman of the Housing Committee of the West Harlem Social Agency, contributes another important article on Negro Housing. Mr. Nichols, a Negro, living in Harlem has participated in several Housing conferences at the De Porres Interracial Center. . . . The excellent article on Negro Housing in New Orleans is contributed by HERMAN A. WASHINGTON, a member of the faculty of Xavier University. . . . Dr. EDWARD E. BEST, well known Harlem physician, is an Associate Editor of the REVIEW. The essay, "His Father's Business," is highly recommended. . . . Our readers will remember J. A. ROGERS, a well known Negro writer, who has made an extensive study of the Negro in history. He has traveled extensively in Europe and Africa where he made valuable research. . . . In this issue THEOPHILUS LEWIS, our dramatic critic, in addition to his regular column reviews *Native Son*, by Richard Wright.

"What Can I Do?"

This question, frequently asked by members and visitors finds an answer in the suggestions made at the anniversary conference. The specific proposals may be summarized as follows:

- 1.) Secure an engagement for one of our speakers to address your Catholic organizations, parish society or sodality.
- 2.) Interest your friends in subscribing to the REVIEW.
- 3.) Scores of Catholic High School Libraries would be glad to receive gift subscriptions to the INTER-RACIAL REVIEW. Here is a wonderful opportunity for enlightening the Catholic leaders of tomorrow.
- 4.) Bring your friends to the De Porres Interracial Center. The exhibits are interesting and informative.

Interracial Center Conferences

The program of bi-weekly seminar conferences held at the De Porres Interracial Center (at 20 Vesey Street) continues to attract representative audiences. An excellent schedule of topics with outstanding speakers. Every first and third Thursday of the month from 5.15 to 6.30 p.m. Our readers are cordially invited to attend and participate.

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THE ANTI-LYNCHING BILL

Although the Senate Judiciary Committee has voted out the Anti-Lynching bill and the legislation is now on the Senate Calendar there are persistent rumors current in Washington that efforts are being made to defer debate and action on this bill until Congress adjourns.

This is a serious situation and one that should cause all supporters of the proposed law to abolish lynching to notify their Senators that immediate action is imperative.

It would be a violation of the will of the majority of the American people and of the Senate if another undemocratic filibuster should defeat the measure. But it would be even worse if a small minority group should succeed in preventing the bill from being "called up" for Senatorial consideration.

A strong editorial which appears in the *Providence Visitor*—the official Catholic weekly of that diocese—points out that the consistent failure of local authorities demonstrates that a Federal law is required to wipe out this national evil:

"People in the South are humiliated by crimes which reflect upon all the people of that section. And, in regard to the country as a whole, there is a growing conviction that an ignorant and irresponsible minority should not any longer be permitted to commit a crime which has the effect of branding the United States in the eyes of the rest of the civilized world as semi-barbaric."

This important editorial calls attention to the fact that public opinion—both North and South—favors the proposed law:

"Various surveys of opinion in the nation as a whole, and especially in the South have brought to light a strong change of sentiment favorable to a Federal enactment against lynching."

As we said before the bill, to which the majority of Senators are committed, is in danger of defeat *because of inaction*. We hope that insistent inquiry will be addressed to the leaders of the Senate to learn the cause of this strange delay. There has been plenty of discussion and consideration of this matter both in the Congress and in the forum of public opinion.

Only a small and determined minority stands opposed to this legislation.

The American people have repeatedly indicated their desire that the Federal Anti-Lynching bill be enacted. The obstructionists should not be permitted to smother the bill by delay and adjournment.

Lynching must be banished from our national life!
Lynching must go!

20th Century Carpet-Baggers

When John L. Lewis told the story of Southern sins against democracy at a meeting of labor and civic leaders in West Virginia, our heart warmed up again to this beetle-browed thumper of the tom-toms. For, few labor and political leaders have dared say as much south of Philadelphia. Not only the Negro, Lewis declared, but the white working class is barred from the ballot in the South. North Carolina is the only State in the South to pass legislation making it possible for the poor man to vote, tax or no tax.

But when Lewis proposed building a party, a Third Party, if you please, based on the C.I.O., the American Youth Congress, the National Negro Congress, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and perhaps the Urban League, we felt that Lee Pressman and the rest of the revolutionaries in the Lewis camp had given him bad advice. Certainly nothing is more stupid than the idea that the N.A.A.C.P. is the type of organization that would tie up in such an alliance.

We do not mean that the Congress of Industrial Organizations should not go into politics openly, since everybody knows by now that labor organizations are in politics. To question the right of the working man to vote for those he considers his friends is to deny simple, democratic rights. But to make any party a party of races is to bring back all the handicaps of the days of Reconstruction.

While there is every reason to believe that the N.A.A.C.P. should remain independent it should be free to offer political advice. We believe that this type of organization should be non-partisan, but if N.A.A.C.P. officials want to enter politics as individuals to support this or that candidate for office, certainly they should be free to do so. Anything else would ring of hypocrisy. Still, for a group of people to plan carrying the Negro vote as a bloc into any political camp, is to deny the plain fact that all Ne-

groes are not of the working class; and even when of the working class, are not all friendly to the C.I.O.

Finally, we do not believe that John L. Lewis and the C.I.O. should be entrusted with any control of the Negro vote. This would merely repeat the political errors of the past when Republicans packed the Conventions by controlling Negro leaders. This practice was carpet-bagging with a vengeance, and the proposal made by John L. Lewis would merely dignify the procedure with new devices. Happily there is no indication that John L. Lewis or anyone else can corral the Negro vote.

Interracial Relations

From the watch tower of the De Porres Center on Vesey Street glimpses of the Hudson River can be seen through the spaces between the skyscrapers. The vista can give rise to a fascinating reverie on the interracial problem. If we picture New Jerseyites as Negroes and New Yorkers as white, the question of communication between the two typifies many a problem of race relations. No one would think of doing away with the Hudson filling it up, or covering it over with a continuous series of bridges. New Jersey and its residents as over against New York and New Yorkers, have a certain natural unity and sovereignty that must be respected. Yet apparently these two unities cannot get along without each other—for thus we must interpret the ever augmenting means of communication between them. There are multifarious ferries—steam and “electric” even—handsome and ingenious tunnels, and finally the magnificent George Washington Bridge. All these provide for pleasurable and profitable intercourse between neighbors of the two states. Doubtless a variety of motives inspires this traffic of people. Now and again some city slicker sells a gold brick to a Jersey rustic, and occasionally a week-ending New Yorker brings back from a Jersey roadside stand a batch of “farm” eggs fresh from a New York cold storage plant. But, by and large, justice presides over these interstate relationships—justice that furnishes its own reward, since it makes continuous relations possible, orderly and mutually beneficial.

So too in the field of interracial relations justice must keep the bridges and tunnels open and the ferries skimming!

Where does charity or love appear in our Hudson River reverie? Charity begins at home, and in most

instances it has a full time job there. How few travelers cross our river *pour raison d'amour*! But what of supernatural charity bringing all men together through the bond of Christ? Since it is supernatural, it knows no natural or conventional barriers such as rivers and so-called color lines. But even then is not this supernatural charity part of the superabundance added to those who "seek first the kingdom of God and His justice?"

A Subway Strike

Nothing chills the New York public more than talk of a subway strike. There is reason to fear a labor trouble underground, since the danger of sabotage will be present months after the strike is ended. Loosened rails, scattered bolts, cut wires can wreck a train, and no death could be more horrible than one that would occur underground if a ten-car train carrying upwards of two thousand passengers should jump the rails and plow up the supporting structure.

The Transport Union under the leadership of Michael J. Quill, a Catholic, a former member of the City Council, and a Fellow Traveler of the *Moscow-Daily Worker* train, seeks to prevent the ordinary procedure whereby employees on the two systems will stand Civil Service examination when the City of New York takes them into its railroad set-up. Whether Mr. Quill sees this as a step forward for the working-class if the strike is called does not interest us as much as the policy of Jim Crow that the Interborough Rapid Transit and the Brooklyn-Manhattan Rapid Transit companies have maintained all these years, something that Mr. Quill has shown no inclination to check.

"ALIBI NEGROES"

Of course, the I.R.T. finally promoted two Negroes to posts as conductors after the men who were made money-changers were dropped for the lack of seniority rights when the Elevated line was closed on Sixth Avenue. Two conductors on the Lenox Line hardly makes up for the thousands of dollars that Negro riders drop into the turnstiles each year.

But the Green Line busses which replaced the dilapidated trolley lines in Manhattan, recently hired several hundred bright young men but not a single Negro is found among them. What has Fellow Traveler Quill to say about this? If the union is not strong enough to break down Jim Crow in the City

of New York, in the face of the acceptance of Negro conductors and engineers on the Eighth Avenue line, what good is the union to Negro members?

There have been several letters of the "me too" quality printed in the Negro press lately. Certainly a porter who is sufficient a scholar to write the brilliant letters that appear in the *Amsterdam News* supporting Brother Quill in his fight against Civil Service ought to be promoted to a higher position. Certainly, he will not be promoted if Quill's *status quo* goes through. Negro porters will remain Negro porters and no new Negro porters will be hired if Michael J. Quill puts I.R.T.-B.M.T. Jim-Crow under city contract.

WHEN TO THINK TWICE

In this age of charges, counter-charges, propaganda and what goes for impartial judgment, we would hesitate, ordinarily, before calling any man a bamboozler. But Quill does not impress us with sincerity when he campaigns to substitute union seniority for Civil Service. It is poor judgment to talk about a right to strike against the government unless Quill expects to die in the front-line trenches when the fight gets hot. When the smoke is cleared away we think it will be found that Michael J. Quill is using the union to pull political chestnuts out of the fire.

A Positive Program

One of the greatest drawbacks to interracial progress is the lag in activity on the part of Negro leaders to whom the race looks for guidance. It is absolutely true that an explanation can be found for all this; for, slavery left its timidity among Negroes just as it left white folk feeling superior and dictatorial. Certainly, a Negro who dares break with tradition is to be encouraged, and every effort should be made by white people interested in Negroes to stimulate independent thinking and initiative.

There are two errors, however, that interracial movements frequently make. One error—not the least grave—is the tendency to use up valuable time deploping conditions, without setting into action forces to change the conditions. The problem of housing for Negroes is in this category. We are happy to report, however, that our forums sponsored by the Interracial Council have literally taken off the lid to get to the bottom of things.

The discussions led by Franklin D. Nichols and

John E. Nail and the writings contributed by Messrs. Nail, Nichols and George Streator, have pounded on doors heretofore kept locked by race prejudice and the defense of the *status quo*. In particular our three friends have dared be critical of the prevailing Negro thought on matters of housing and social progress generally. And now, with the point of view recorded by P. H. Washington of New Orleans, we have set out on a new path to encourage Negroes to think constructively on their problems and to hack away on a program letting the chips fall where they may.

WHAT ABOUT TRADE?

The *Pittsburgh Courier* carried a discussion in the column edited by P. L. Prattis (March 2, 1940) which was headed, "Are We Doing All We Can To Help Ourselves?" We are not prepared to enter scholastic discussion over trends in American economy, but we are moved to ask with Mr. Prattis:

... What has become of the great Negro barber-shops of the past and the catering concerns? Will some reader explain why most Negro business of the present is restricted to Negro trade? Chinese, Japanese, Indians, when they open businesses, serve the general trade. Is it possible that the general trade will not buy from the Negro if he offers a superior product for the same money or the same product for less money? What's wrong?...

THE LAST PENNY

The INTERRACIAL REVIEW believes that too many Negro leaders have deferred constructive action "until the revolution." This is true of certain white intellectuals, as well. There is no denying that America is rebuilding its economy, and that our Government will intervene to regulate trade in many fields now considered sacred and untouchable. This is necessary for our progress as a nation. But there is nothing in the clouds to encourage the belief held by some that this nation will be run by Communists or by Fascists; or, that class war will solve our economic problems.

For this unhappy state of affairs, white people are much to blame, but not wholly. There is no law or custom to hold Negro thinkers bound by tradition, in matters of industry or matters of spiritual leadership. Mr. Prattis bemoans the wealth thrown away in "numbers" playing. We add race horses, in New York, and expenses of general display, sins common to all races and classes. In addition, we add as a sin the tendency of educated Negroes to apologize for racial shortcomings. This is the second error of interracial movements. Let us avoid both. A positive program is the solution.

Notes From XAVIER UNIVERSITY

The First Catholic College for Negro Youth

LENTEN DRAMA

The Little Theatre group of the University presented William M. Lamers' powerful version of the world's most tragic drama, *Calvary*, a drama of the Sacred Passion of Our Lord in three acts. Capacity audiences attended the annual presentation of Lenten dramas by the University students. Many were moved to tears during several of the scenes. The interpretation of the role of Peter by Flournoy Coles, and the roles of Judas, Caiaphas, and Joachim by Augusto Rodaniche, Arnaud Mitchell, and Joseph Anderson respectively were exceptionally good.

STUDENT COUNCIL

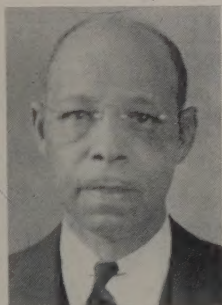
In the recent Student Council elections, Murray Martin, a promising Senior student of the College of Arts and Sciences, was elected president. The student council organization represents an attempt on the part of the administration to encourage the students to make use of and develop qualities for good citizenship and leadership. The spirit of cooperation and the actual manifestation of coordination in student activities on the campus since the establishment of the student organization has been most gratifying. The experiences of Xavierites in these campus activities will contribute to the measure of success they shall attain in activities after graduating from the University.

PAROCHIAL SCHOOL CONCERT

The Department of Music is rapidly making plans for the annual Parochial School Art, Music, and Speech Festival which is held annually in Xavier Gymnasium. The English and Art Departments of the University direct a part of the festival; however, the students of the Department of Music holds the spotlight in that part of the program which seems to hold the greatest amount of interest for the participants and followers of the festival. Particularly popular is the interesting symphonic arrangements of the budding young artists who are members of primary and elementary grade schools.

REHOUSING THE NEGRO IN NEW YORK

By FRANKLIN O. NICHOLS



It is reasonable to expect that Negro leadership will take its place with representatives of other racial and religious groups in the development of the housing program in New York City. The awareness of this leadership with the housing problem not only as it affects the areas in which their people have dominant populations but of other areas as well is attested in the vigorous campaign these leaders organized and conducted to bring significant electoral support to the State Housing Amendment.

This interest is understandable also because the greater numbers of Negro people provide an important proportion of the large mass of the general population who are living in overcrowded, blighted and slum conditions and who are paying rents far out of proportion to income. Because of the varying economic and cultural classes that make up the approximate three hundred and twenty-five thousand Negro people living in Greater New York the housing problem involves elements similar to those affecting other groups. The situation includes both the proper integration of these people into the housing program for low-income groups and the accommodation of that important number of Negro families capable of paying \$12.50 per room per month and to home buying classes.

LOW INCOME GROUPS

With regard to the first of these the present placement of low-rent houses has included areas in which there are heavy concentrations of Negro population. A review of the present plans of construction also show that housing projects have been announced for areas having mixed populations of various races and nationalistic groups. It is of course reasonable to expect that a proportion of the Negro families, now living as neighbors with these varying groups, will qualify as tenants and will be included in these new projects. This is a sound procedure because one of the fundamental objectives of the housing movement is the rehousing of families in the areas in which new projects are placed. It is also to be hoped that these

new projects will serve to develop the ideal of good neighborliness as one of the significant factors in the protection and perpetuity of American democracy.

In this particular it is well to observe that Negro leadership fully realizes that New York City is composed of many diverse races and nationalistic groups. It recognizes that in this situation many problems may arise with respect to the accommodation of these groups. However, this situation is not considered an insoluble one and it is expected that where problems do arise they will be worked out on a basis of co-operation, conciliation and a proper regard for public relations.

FOR HIGHER INCOMES

The second aspect of the housing problem as it affects Negro people is that relating to the housing of those families who can pay rents of \$12 to \$14 a room per month. In a recent review of the findings of the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics the author of this article estimated that there were approximately ten thousand Negro families in New York City that could without economic discomfort pay rents of this level. There are probably more that could meet this rental requirement with some sacrifice. An important number of Negro families are now paying rents ranging from \$10 to as high as \$20 per room per month. Negro families have recently moved into that section of the city extending from 135th Street along Edgecombe Avenue, St. Nicholas Avenue and intervening streets to 163rd Street. Rents in this section range from \$10 to \$20 per room per month and the vacancy percentage in most of the better-class apartment houses is exceptionally low. There is no doubt that there exists a safe market for investment in providing homes for this particular economic strata of Negro people. Here are found professional people, including physicians, teachers, social workers, Civil Service workers, well-paid clerks, and others who can afford these rents. This group has often been referred to as one of the best sustainers of the better-conditioned obsolescent property (which in many instances is poorly maintained and poorly serviced).

In recent months there has been considerable agitation by financial institutions in favor of new legislation to enable them to take advantage of the provisions of the State Housing Division in order that they may enter the investment housing field. These insti-

tutions should consider the possibilities of providing housing for this group among those for which they propose to build. There are many factors which establish these people as a stable and financially competent tenantry.

OBSTACLES

Among the deterrents to new construction for this class of Negro tenantry have been the erroneous conclusions drawn from the many studies of the Harlem area which have placed all the emphasis upon social and economic pathology. There are many grave problems confronting Harlem but analysis will reveal that these are similar to those of other sections affected by blight, dilapidation and overcrowding. Very little attention has been given to the large number of Negro families who are in the middle class level as this relates to culture and income. The publicity given to Harlem has led many students to believe that *all* the families living there are of lowest income, have high rates of disease, are unemployed and are on relief. This is not in accordance with the facts. There is a large number of Negro families that would follow the same trend as other middle-income groups by moving away from these undesirable conditions did the opportunity exist. It is this class of family that continues to pioneer and invades other sections seeking better living conditions.

Attention should be given to the growing blight of West Harlem because of the large amount of property in this section that could be usable for years to come with proper rehabilitation and maintenance. It is a disturbing sight to see this area, having so many structurally sound buildings, being allowed to fall into disrepair and dilapidation. There are a few instances of rehabilitation but the number is so small as to be negligible. These offer an opportunity for study the value and financial soundness of a type of rehabilitation. However, the great need is a program of large-scale rehabilitation on a community-planned basis. The importance of this need cannot be over-emphasized as every indication points to the fact that it will be many years before there will be enough new construction to meet the housing problems of this or other parts of the city. It is, therefore, most important that serious consideration be given to plans for rehabilitation and that added emphasis be placed upon the need for more scientific maintenance operation.

The third factor in this matter is that of home buy-

ing by Negro families. Indications are that there is an increasing number of Negroes buying homes in outlying areas in an effort to find improved environmental conditions and to avoid high rents and the density of urban living. There is no available information as to the size of this trend. Nor are there any facts indicating to the extent to which the various governmental devices for encouraging home buying has been utilized by Negro families. Real-estate brokers report a growing number of families that are absorbing Home Owner Loan houses that have been placed upon the market. Some other observers suggest the possibility of large-scale developments and projects under cooperative ownership supplemented by governmental aid. This is an area of housing investigation that deserves more study and analysis than is possible within the limits of this article.

LIVING IN EVERY BOROUGH

The general considerations presented above apply to all sections of New York City. It is essential to recognize that the Negro population has lived in practically all the boroughs of this city, either contiguously with other racial groups or as an integral part of those groups. Negro families living in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx are beginning to experience many of the housing difficulties that have long characterized Harlem. Continued progress in the rehousing of New York City's Negro population depends much upon the appreciation of sound interracial policies — in the administration of public housing; in the cooperation of qualified Negro leadership with those responsible for administration; in the realization on the part of investors of the valuable market within the race for projects designed to rent for \$12 to \$13 per room per month and in the encouragement of home buying on the part of that considerable number of Negro families capable of investing from \$500 to a \$1,000 as equity payments in small homes.

Investment in housing projects, under the provisions of the New York State Public Housing Law, deserves the serious attention of the better financially situated Negro fraternal orders, insurance companies and churches. Here are many opportunities for contributing to the solution of the housing problem. These organizations represent important potential sources for the creation of capital and the organization of Negro finance for this type of self help in a sound field of investment with assured income under proper management.

NEGRO HOUSING IN NEW ORLEANS

By HERMAN A. WASHINGTON

In the past few years the nation as a whole has become increasingly conscious of the so-called "housing problem." In every community studies are being made and programs are being launched with a view to solving the shelter problems of at least one-third of the urban population. New Orleans is not different in this respect from the many other large cities, for at the present time there are six low-cost housing projects being erected in this community at a cost of approximately thirty million dollars.

The matter of housing in New Orleans has a peculiar history that is closely related to the history of the first New Orleans settlers and their attempts to reclaim swamp lands and wrest a town site from the Louisiana bayous. Behind the acquisition of the land upon which the present city rests is probably one of the most interesting stories in American history and it is reasonable to assume that the problem of housing from the very beginning has been acute. The question of narrow streets and small lots is very definitely presented in the layout of the French Quarters which was the original site of the city.

Years later, after the development of an adequate drainage system, more land became available for residential purposes — new land reclaimed with great labor, but developed with little thought. For it is a fact that poor city planning has contributed largely to the present irregularities in the growth of the city.

A cursory inspection of housing facilities with respect to Negroes gives something of the picture of general conditions in the community as a whole. Contrary to conditions in most large cities, the slums of New Orleans are spread over the entire community and are often just a few blocks away from some of the best residential areas. In years past, Negroes moved gradually into homes vacated by whites who

found it expedient to move for one reason or another and in this way permeated almost every residential section in the city, occupying houses that are now generally run down or even totally unfit for human habitation. Very few of the homes that have been available for Negro rental and occupancy in the past thirty or forty years can meet any set standards of sanitation and adequacy. In a recent study made it was found that approximately 75% of the Negro families are living in substandard houses. This fact remains unchanged regardless of the standard of measurement used.

Since 1900 there has been a steady increase in the Negro population. A marked increase was observed especially since 1929. Figures show that between 1900 and 1937 the Negro population increased 31.3% whereas there was only 3.4% increase in the white population.

Yet during this period there were practically no new homes being erected in the community at large and no constructive building program for the low income group—particularly nothing for the Negro.

In 1925 an attempt was made to set up residential segregation by law. The State Legislature passed statutes and the City Council of New Orleans passed an ordinance that would have prevented Negroes from moving into any area that was predominately white—and vice versa. When these laws were tested in the courts they were declared unconstitutional.² Although residential segregation is not legally permitted in the community the effect of such restriction is maintained through mutual understanding among real-estate operators with reference to the housing of Negroes. When—

² See *Tyler vs. Horman*, 158 La. 439, 104 & 200 (1925); *Land Development Co. vs. City of New Orleans*, 13 F (2d) 898, 17 F (2d) 1016 (1926).

NEGRO-WHITE POPULATION OF NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA, 1900-1937¹

GROUPS	1900	%	1910	%	1920	%	1930	%	#1937	%
		INCR.		INCR.		INCR.		INCR.		INCR.
White	208,946	— — —	294,403	19.3	286,289	14.7	327,792	14.4	339,182	3.4
Negro	77,714	— — —	89,262	14.8	100,930	13.0	129,632	28.4	10,213	31.3
**Totals	286,660	— — —	338,665	18.6	387,219	14.3	485,762	18.4	509,395	11.4

Sources: Bureau of the Census, U. S. Department of Commerce, 12th, 13th, 14th, and 15th Census (1900-'10-'20-'30).

¹ Jones, Alvin H., *The Labor Situation on the New Orleans Waterfront*, Appendix I, (Unpublished).

Department of Commerce and Industry State of Louisiana, *Louisiana Resources and Purchasing Power* 1938, pp. 186-187.

** Percent increase in total population.

ever vacancies are listed in real-estate offices, rental sheets denote whether the property is intended for colored or white occupancy. The better class houses in the city are seldom available to the Negro regardless of his ability to pay.

It has been reliably reported that the city of New Orleans stands first among all cities of 1,000 population and over in the number of persons who earn less than \$1,000 a year. Recent studies have revealed that just about 94% of the Negroes and about 44% of the

whites earn less than \$1,000 a year. These figures seem to show that in addition to the Negro's inability to obtain adequate shelter in the open real-estate market, he is also unable to pay an adequate economic rental sufficient to induce private industry to build homes in which he might live.

The loss of jobs among Negroes has steadily increased and, with the recent influx of population to the Urban Area, the competition for available jobs has been unusually keen. This has resulted in a large

Record Class of Colored Novices Received



Believed to be the largest class of colored novices ever received into a novitiate in the United States, these 19 postulants received the white veil of the Oblate Sisters of Provi-

dence, March 9, at St. Frances' Convent, Baltimore, Md., motherhouse of the Sisters. The community is 111 years old and has 204 professed Sisters and 27 novices.

amount of economic dependency. It is reflected in the fact that even though the Negro represents only one-third of the total New Orleans population he represents approximately 52% of the total case load in the Public Welfare Department.⁵ It has also been estimated that about one-half the number of employees on W.P.A. projects in the local area are Negroes. There is no attempt here to estimate the number of Negroes who need relief, but, who for some reason or other, have not been able to obtain it.

Serious attention must be given to the general conditions under which Negroes live in this community if the effects of current public programs are to be successful in rehabilitating the masses. There must be an increase in the economic status of the Negro locally before any great progress can be made in any direction. This should be especially important to both racial groups when one considers the interrelationship of the two races.

In the studies that have been made of housing conditions among Negroes in the city, interesting information, as concerns problems of health and delinquency has been revealed. The mortality rate of the Negro group is almost twice that of the white. The death rate among children under one year of age

shows nearly the same ratio. Tuberculosis and syphilis are quite prevalent.

Court records reveal that two-thirds of the delinquent youths are of Negro extraction and figures for adult miscreants show a majority of Negro defendants.

The relationship between housing, health and delinquency may not be direct but it is not unreasonable to acknowledge a definite social effect of the first named upon the two latter conditions. When one considers that in innumerable dwelling units throughout the city, five and six families are all using one outdoor toilet and a common indoor sink—that in hundreds of other units there is no running water (yard pumps) — in thousands of homes, no gas or electricity and only the most primitive means of existence, one can understand how slum conditions and disease and delinquency go hand in hand.

The present low-cost housing program that is under way recognizes the seriousness of the housing problem with reference to Negroes in the community. As mentioned before, there are six projects to be built and of this number, four are for Negro families. This is a fair beginning for the huge business of social rehabilitation. Negroes are convinced, however, that if public housing for their group in New Orleans is to be effective at all they must be included not merely as recipients of shelter but as dynamic, participating citizens in the planning and development of the housing program.

HIS FATHER'S BUSINESS

By EDWARD E. BEST, M.D.

... Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

Those were three trying days for Mary and Joseph. What anguish they must have suffered as they trudged back to Jerusalem in search of Jesus! Had he been snatched by bandits? What cruel fate at the hands of a none-too-friendly crowd had befallen the Boy Wonder of Nazareth — Pride and joy of these near and dear to Him and at the same time object of hate and suspicion of others? Tears of joy welled in their eyes as they finally spied Him in the temple. But there He was — Jesus the Youth — in conference

with men many years His elder, doctors, seers of their time, perhaps some reactionaries and die-hards. He was "hearing them and asking them questions" on perplexing topics of the day.

A layman might well leave to more competent minds interpretation of the real import of this Gospel narrative. But it is so touching and at the same time fascinating that it inveigles the mind of the most casual reader. For instance, one might wonder why the Youth was not missed earlier in the journey. The answer could be that He desired just those three days in which to put over His program. It would seem,

too, that this is one example of the fact that whenever and to whomever Jesus spoke it was His own words that carried the full weight of the lesson He was teaching—other persons and circumstances furnished the occasion. So we might ponder here the reply to the Blessed Mother and His gracious explanation that He was about His Father's business. John, His precursor had heralded the establishment of a kingdom—in fact, it was "at hand," awaiting only the coming of the Son of God, Prince of Peace. It would seem logical then to conclude that it was the business of this kingdom to which He referred. True, His preaching, miracles and passion were to come in later years, but here was an opportunity to advance this mission which He could not resist.

Might we not find here an example of the applicability of Christ's teachings to all times and to all conditions of man? Is not this striking episode a lesson to youth of today that it is not beyond them to busy themselves for this same cause? Nor can it be said the opportunity no longer exists; His Father's business is by no means bankrupt, notwithstanding subtle efforts (directed particularly at youth) to spread such an idea. There is no question of its ultimate success. Having the pattern of a Divine and eternal plan it will, of course, go on to its consummation at the end of time. There is, however, a question for the individual whether he will participate and how.

Youth would not be denied their place. With new and inspired zeal the faithful are taking their place under the banner of Catholic Action.

Unfortunately, there is that inclination on the part of a dominant race to restrict participation of those with whom they hold the upper hand. This might be done in part, and aside from rank prejudice, to their unawareness of the desire of minority groups to learn and labor in this common cause. If the Negro in America has shown in a discernible way what things are nearest his heart; if he has in any way manifested his sublime hopes for a happy and eternal destiny, then it should not be difficult to recognize his eagerness to participate to the limit of his capacity in the cause that is no less his than anyone else's.

But no one is more aware than he that Catholic life in its richest form requires Catholic education as well as faith and courage. True, he is being educated in almost every non-Catholic college and university in the country but that type of education hardly pre-

pares him in any special way to aid in the apostolate of the Church.

He has been heartened in recent years by removal of the bars that in the past have excluded him from Catholic institutions of learning. In this connection the unselfishness of white students is as commendable as the enlightened zeal of their elders.

This recent boon to the hopes of Negro youth finds support and encouragement from His Holiness, Pius XII, who in his letter to the Church in America at the very beginning of his pontificate, referring to the Negro said. . . "for in the field of religion and education we know that they need special care and comfort." With such cooperation and encouragement there is no doubt that a new day is dawning, not only for Negro youth but for all youth. It will find them awake and alert. Never before have they explored our social labyrinth with such keen vision: never before have they had such a grasp of national and international affairs, nor have they ever been so conscious of their potential power to help fashion the World of Tomorrow. Apparently they are intent on doing something to bring a semblance of order and the chaos bequeathed to them.

Strangely enough we older ones no longer look upon them with that condescension and skepticism as of yore. Indeed, we are becoming accustomed to call upon youth to help in the big things and, sometimes to lead the way. We are becoming accustomed to depend upon their courage, their alert and inquiring minds and upon their love of truth and justice. They are binding all these assets into the conduct of human affairs and the practice of religion. Then too, confidence in youth is growing because of the fact that with the exception of a few impetuous ones, they do not consider themselves so original and infallible as not to be able to learn something from the past. No doubt they are aware that the problems of one generation give way to other and perhaps more complex ones of the next. We believe they are resolved, however, not to repeat the mistakes of the past nor to put off all their serious thinking for the arm-chair period.

Our foremost hopes for them is that they will all be able to anchor themselves in a sound, rational philosophy of life, with a definite goal to peace and contentment; a goal not attained by agitators, race baitors nor scoffers, but by those who show good will to all and attend to the real business of life.

HITLER AND THE NEGRO

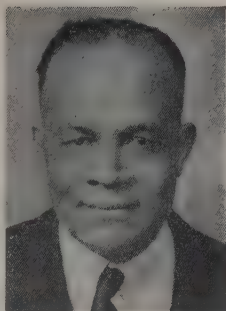
By J. A. ROGERS

Adolph Hitler inspired no doubt by the valorous conduct of the Negroes in the last World War declares in *Mein Kampf* that Negroes are "half-apes."

This, however, is far from being the opinion of the pre-Hitler German if one is to judge by the various monuments and pictures of Negroes in the German museums and other public places.

Foremost of these pictures and monuments are those of St. Maurice (or St. Mauritius) leading Catholic saint of Germany, who is invariably depicted in Germany as a Negro of the finest type. St. Maurice is patron of the city of Cobourg and he appears in the city's coat-of-arms. His picture by Grunewald hangs in the Alte Pinokathek, Southern Germany's largest museum. (At least I saw it there as late as 1934.) Another painting of St. Maurice by Hans Baldung is, if I remember rightly, in the Dresden Museum. There is also a monument of him in armor in the Cathedral of Magdeburg.

In almost every German art gallery are pictures by great artists of "The Adoration of Magi," one of who is invariably depicted as a Negro. The most celebrated shrine in Germany is that of the Black Virgin in Alt-Oetting, Bavaria. There and there especially in



Southern Germany and in what was once Austria are shrines of Black Madonnas. The blackness of these, be it noted is not due to age as the lace and some of the other decorations of these statues are still nearly white. Only the face is black.

On the most important bridge over the Spree at the south end of the Unter den Linden near the Berlin Cathedral in the very center of the north side of the bridge is a monument not less than eight feet high of

a Negro. In the park of the royal palace at San Souci, Potsdam, favorite residence of the last Kaiser are several statuettes of Negroes, who were the favorites of the Prussian rulers.

In the state pictures of Kaiser Wilhelm I, between the years 1867 and 1870 appears a Negro as a German officer. This is Henri Noel an unmixed Negro brought by Rohlf from Central Africa, whom Wilhelm I adopted as his own son. I have given further details, of this Negro in "The 100 Amazing Facts About the Negro."

Hitler is a native of Austria and there, too, St. Maurice and the Black Virgin are highly revered. In the Lichtenstein Museum in Vienna are the portraits of Angelo Solliman and his daughter and grandson, Baron Eduard von Feuchtersleben.

Angelo Solliman was a Negro ex-slave who became the tutor of royalty, and the friend and companion of Joseph II, ruler of the Holy Roman Empire. In the Vienna Museum is another piece of priceless Negro art: that of the Venus of Willendorf, the oldest known representation of a human being and executed by a Negro artist, about 10,000 or 15,000 B. C.

Several other art treasures in which Negroes figure could be cited. It is interesting to know what Hitler and his brown-shirted reformers have done about these Negro monuments, and how they reconcile them with their statement that the Negro is a "half-ape," and the Negro professional man a monstrosity. Perhaps these pictures and monuments have been removed or destroyed; only the coming of peace will tell.



The two portraits above are: (Left) Angelo Solliman, who was a friend of Emperor Joseph II; (Right) Baron von Feuchtersleben. (In the next column): The picture of St. Maurice, by Grunewald, is in Pinokathek Museum, Munich.



PLAYS And A Point of View

By THEOPHILUS LEWIS

DRAMA OF DEMOCRACY

To those old fashioned folks who still doubt that motion pictures are coming of age, developing from an amusement to an art, I suggest that they compare *The Fifth Column* with *Virginia City*, the former a much, probably too much, discussed play, the latter a picture. The plot structure of both the play and the picture are identical. Both are essentially spy stories, and in both espionage is foiled by counter-espionage. In the play the spying and counterspying occur in the recent civil war in Spain while in the picture the scene is the American Civil War. While play and picture are similar in structure and theme they differ in intention. The play sets itself up as a militant crusader for democracy. The picture assumes the more modest role of reviewing a few pages of history with a tolerant eye.

The Fifth Column borrows its title from a statement to the press handed out by a Nationalist leader during the late Spanish unpleasantness. Reporters quoted the Nationalist as saying that four military columns were converging on Madrid from the field while a fifth column of civilians in the city was passing out information and working to undermine the morale of the Loyalist defenders. The hero and leading characters of *The Fifth Column*, which might have been more accurately labeled "The Sixth Column," are Loyalist counter-spies detailed to discover and destroy the Nationalist spies. The author, Ernest Hemingway, portrays the Loyalist counter-spies as soldiers in a holy war in defense of democracy. At least that is what he attempts to do. What he actually does is to give the stage another play of adventure, lust and license, while his defense of the Loyalist cause gets lost in a miasma of alcohol and loose behavior.

Now the issues involved in the Spanish war were not as clear and simple as advocates of the opposing sides usually assume. The initial fact is that the army unsheathed the sword to veto a government elected by the people, an act which has been represented as an attack upon democracy. That Communist elements were included in the government hardly extenuates the Nationalists' appeal to violence. As intelligent men, the Nationalists must have known that something about the temperament and methods of Reds, which are to nag and irritate anybody in a position of responsibility. When Communists themselves assume the responsibility of government, they cease to be Communists and become bureaucrats, ruthlessly purging, i.e., murdering their former comrades who do not tamely fall in line.

When the army revolted, Communist influence in the gov-

ernment increased. Russia offered help, for a price, and the Loyalists accepted it. The Nationalists were equally indiscriminating in choosing their allies. They brought in Mohammedan Moors to defend their Christian heritage, and accepted the assistance of Fascist "volunteers" and pagan Nazi technicians. As they were opposed by Fascists and Nazis, the assertion that the Loyalists were defending the frontier of democracy seemed at least plausible.

Subsequent events have further confused the issue. Communist Russia and Nazi Germany have changed the enemies to friends, and Fascist Italy may ultimately decide to make it a threesome. Few observers without special sources of information would now have the temerity to assert who was fighting for what in Spain. All the fairly well informed man knows is that the victorious Falangistas are effecting some of the reforms intended by the defeated progressives.

With so much controversial material at his disposal, any competent literary man should be able to fashion a provocative play oriented from either point of view, even though it might be faulty in structure. In *The Fifth Column* there is no fire of controversy or impasse of irreconcilable ideals. Instead there are gusts of fustian about the sacredness of democratic ideals, some swashbuckling heroics and the familiar Hemingway overemphasis of rum and sex which sets rows of women to giggling over a realistic rape scene.

It would be unfair to compare *The Fifth Column*, obviously a shabby play, with *Virginia City*, one of the stronger pictures, only it happens that both are current on the season's menu of entertainment and practically identical in theme. In *Virginia City* a Confederate spy and a Union counterspy strive to frustrate each other's plans. They respect, even admire each other as men, and both are in love with the same Southern woman, who loves the Union spy. The picture is packed with thrilling action and hairbreadth escapes. But the heroism of *Virginia City* flows naturally from a conflict of loyalties and emotions while the heroics of *The Fifth Column* are adventitious derring-do.

In *Virginia City* the Southern woman is torn between love and duty; and, so far as the decision rests with her, she chooses the latter. All the leading characters understand the opposite point of view, even though they cannot sympathize with it. In *The Fifth Column* there is only one point of view, supported by a plethora of ranting against Fascist barbarism. The qualitative difference between the play and the picture is precisely the difference between dramatic tension and melodramatic excitement.

That a better than average picture should be superior in content and structure to a mediocre play is not intrinsically a matter of any great importance. But the fact that *Virginia City* is only one of many recent pictures of high quality indicate a trend toward a major development in the theater. If the trend continues it may mean that drama will be returned to the people, again become a really popular art.

The early mystery plays were acted either in the churches, or in the streets. Drama was intended for the edification of the masses. Later it was shut up in courtyards and tennis courts, and finally in palatial theaters, where only the well to do could enjoy it. The movies are again making it the democratic art it was in the beginning.

AS YOUTH SEES IT

EDITED BY YOUTH

HOW TO BECOME RACE-PREJUDICED

Catholic social philosophy has always denied the existence of innate race prejudices just as it has always denied the existence of innate racial inferiorities.

For our part, we have always been convinced that race bigotry is insensibly acquired from the environment but we have never expected to be presented with empirical evidence to demonstrate this belief.

But this is exactly what we now have, in the following account by Evelio Grillo of Xavier University, New Orleans, who arguing from the case of the Negro immigration to Tampa, supports the philosophical tenet with experimental data.

Let Mr. Grillo carry on:

"Experiences we have during our childhood and early adolescence very often fail to have meaning for us until at a later age the full impact of their significance hits us squarely. The dawn of understanding can evoke from us, of course, different reactions, depending upon the situations newly understood and the implications involved in the experiences recalled. Thus, we seldom understand strict disciplinary treatment on the part of our parents until at a later age we not only understand it but are even grateful for it.

"But there are other experiences, the understanding of which falls far short of evoking gratitude in us; indeed, bitterness is the most logically expected and most often experienced reaction to them. It is this latter type to which must belong the early racial experiences of every Negro child. Early in life he is taught innumerable 'must not's' without having the slightest idea as to the 'why' of these 'must not's.' Early in life he feels the sting of remorseless prejudice without understanding the reasons behind this undeserved contempt. As he grows he begins to realize more and more that it is his color which makes the difference, but even then he lacks the understanding of the biggest 'why'—the 'why' which demands the grounds for this difference. Matured, he learns the story and background of race prejudice and begins to experience more poignantly its effects. It is then that he begins to see into so many of the bewildering little experiences which impressed him so deeply in his childhood.

"In the quaint 'city within a city' which is Ybor City in Tampa, Florida, where I was born and where I lived until I was fifteen years of age, I faced many of these puzzling experiences, the significance of which often dawns upon me in moments of reminiscence. My mother and father were members of that host of cigar makers which was lured to America from Cuba by the transfer of the greater portion of the

cigar-making industry to Tampa. When this mixed group came over it brought with it its traditions, customs, and attitudes, including among these an attitude on race much more civilized than that to which it was to be introduced. In Ybor City the two races dwelt in amicable harmony and mutual regard and respect. Those of the older generation worked side by side in the factories, established their families in the same neighborhoods, and visited each other extensively. Indeed, they became race conscious only as American law and tradition made them so.

"The younger generation, that to which I belong, rapidly began to assimilate and adopt as its own American customs, traditions, and attitudes. The children of the white Cubans attended white schools, where whatever prejudices they may have acquired by observation of the general subjection of Negroes and discrimination against them were strengthened by instruction of a biased nature. The children of the Negro Cubans attended Negro schools where they acquired, indirectly if not directly, an attitude towards the other group equally as antagonistic as that which confronted them. No exposition is necessary in regards to the experiences which might have faced one who found himself in this atmosphere. But in this history of the assimilation of each immigrant racial group by its corresponding group over here lies the explanation of many of the perplexing experiences which were mine when I was younger.

"I could not understand, for instance, why my mother worked side by side with and was a close friend of individuals of the other group while their children held me in contempt and I distrusted them. I could not understand why I could play with many of them in the neighborhood and then found myself ignored or shunned when I met them elsewhere. Mother would speak to me of her childhood in Cuba, and I could not understand why the children of those who were her compatriots over there should have seemed so foreign to me over here. There were many other ramifications of the situation which were a source of bewilderment to me until I experienced more extensively racial prejudice as it exists and learned more of its background and of the purposes to which it is often put.

"Six years have passed since I left Tampa. Last year I heard that a group of these very sons of my parents' compatriots had petitioned the city fathers to establish further restricted residence zones within Ybor City. I was told also that efforts were being put forth to exclude Negroes completely from the neighborhood in which I was reared.

"I am no longer puzzled, for I have learned all about the insidiousness of American race prejudice and the strength of its influence."

* * * * *

Reading Mr. Grillo's story, we are comforted. If the account seems a strange one to bring us joy, let it be remembered that "insidious" as the tradition of race prejudice is in America, it is only a tradition. Mr. Grillo has well shown that it is by no means a law of human nature. And, since it is merely an accidental cultural (or anti-cultural) by-product, it is remediable. It is the Catholic attitude toward race which throws the *remediability* of race prejudice into boldest relief.

FROM HERE AND THERE DURING THE MONTH

● SOUTHERN BISHOPS CALL CONFERENCE

Atlanta, Ga.—The first annual meeting of the Southern Conference on Catholic Activities will be held here April 15 and 16th under the patronage of the Most Rev. Gerald P. O'Hara, Bishop of Savannah-Atlanta. Twelve Southern Bishops have already signified their intention of sending delegations.

It is the purpose of the conference to study the problems of the South and to suggest possible solutions in the light of the papal encyclicals.

There will be round table discussions on labor and industry in the South, the Church in the rural South, the Church and the Negro, Catholic education, the press and lay organizations.

● PREDOMINANTLY NEGRO COUNTIES DECREASING, CENSUS SHOWS

Washington, D. C.—According to the Bureau of the Census, one of the many interesting facts which the 1940 Census will bring to light is the number of counties in the United States where Negroes constitute 75 percent or more of the total population.

Previous Censuses have shown that the number of such counties has been gradually decreasing since 1910. In that year there were fifty-three. In 1920 there were only thirty-six, and in 1930 only nineteen.

The 1930 enumeration showed that Mississippi had eight counties in which Negroes constituted 75 percent or more of the total population; Alabama, six; Georgia, two; and Arkansas, Louisiana and Virginia, one each.

Tunica County, Mississippi, and Lowndes County, Alabama, had the densest Negro populations reported in the 1930 Census. Colored persons constituted 85.8 percent of the people living in each.

● LAUDS WORK OF PRIESTS AND NUNS AMONG COLORED RACE IN UNITED STATES

Washington, March 25.—The work of priests and nuns among the colored people of this country was praised by Dr. Thomas W. Turner, president of the Federation of Colored Catholics, in a radio address yesterday. Dr. Turner spoke in the "Wings Over Jordan" program on a national network of the Columbia Broadcasting System.

"There are at present about 250,000 Catholic Negroes in the United States," he said. "This number appears to have varied but little in the last quarter-century. Large accessions through conversions are reported by pastors annually, but the

falling away, which must take place in equal numbers, may be observed as one passes from community to community.

"Records show nine Negro clergymen actively engaged in pastoral work in this country.

"Our unstinted gratitude is due the hundreds of priests and Sisters of the white race who have labored through the years and are still laboring to carry the gospel of truth and education to the colored people. It is especially noteworthy that they have persevered with remarkable zeal and fervor in their unremunerative tasks even though the heavy hand of prejudice, to say nothing of poverty and ignorance, has placed the greatest hindrances in their way.

"It was in consequence of the pressing need of broadening these contacts, as well as, of the many encouraging and helpful suggestions from the clergy engaged in work among the Negroes, that an organization was perfected in 1925, which placed its services at the disposal of the Church, for whatever good it might be permitted to do. This organization, known as the Federated Colored Catholics of the United States is national in scope and is composed of Catholic Negroes, their pastors, and any others who may have a common interest in the problems facing the group in the Church and country.

—N.C.W.C.

BOOKS

NATIVE SON. By Richard Wright. Harpers, New York. 359 pp. \$2.50.

A dozen times a year, more or less, the police are confronted with an astoundingly ghoulish murder, the motive for which eludes sane comprehension. While the authorities search for clues the city editors have a field day. The papers publish horrendous details of the crime, and describe the movements of the police as they follow the trail of the fiend, lose it, pick it up again, and finally corner the quarry, regaling the public with the excitement of a vicarious man hunt.

In *Native Son*, the thrill of the newspaper crime story is stepped up to high voltage and the point of view reversed. Instead of following the maneuvers of the police as they close in on the criminal, the reader is made privy to the mental and emotional processes of the murderer as he skulks and dodges to escape the tentacles of the law. It is an experience that will not be quickly forgotten.

The technique of the novel follows the journalistic pattern so closely that its plot might be the literal transcription of any one of half a hundred horror stories recently played up in the newspapers. Bigger Thomas has a subnormal mentality that cannot adjust itself to the inequalities of life. He feels that race prejudice bars him from all the larger activities of society, shuts him up in a dark and cramping corner, from which he can see the glory and gaiety of the world but cannot participate in them. As a consequence he harbors an ingrowing hate and suspicion of white people. The author does not explain that if Bigger had been white he would have

felt just as bitter toward some other inequality, and we have no right to ask him to. It is the author's privilege to select the materials that serve his purpose best. He has given us a plausible, no, a convincing reason for Bigger's conduct, and that is all we can fairly demand of him.

The narrative opens when Bigger, a Chicago reliefer, is on the eve of getting a job, his first after a long period of idleness. His employer is a real-estate magnate who, with his blind wife, is benevolently interested in Negro welfare; so interested, indeed, that he has contributed several millions of dollars for eleemosynary work among Negroes. Their daughter is a Red sympathizer and her sweetheart is an active Communist. All of them are bent on helping Bigger reach a normal and active adjustment to society, although the younger people have more specific and radical ideas in mind. But Bigger, whose mind has been conditioned to hate and distrust the white world, is perplexed and alarmed by the attitude of these friendly white people, and he suspects their motives. He is like an animal caught in a snare, as dangerous to a man who wants to release it as it is to one who intends its destruction.

When Bigger finds himself in a perilous situation, he murders his employer's daughter, hacks off her head and shoves head and torso in the furnace. The reader who likes thrills in his fiction will find plenty here, for the narrative omits none of the grisly details. There are many shivers in these pages as one will find in half a score vampire mysteries. And more are to follow.

The effect of his crime on Bigger, after the first shock of fright, is to cause a tremendous expansion of his age. He is no longer a puny victim of the white world, he is its enemy. The white world cannot ignore him now. It must exert its wits and strength to discover and punish him, while he stands at bay guarding his secret. As his feeling of self importance mounts, he concludes that while outwitting the white world he can lay it under tribute. Forthwith he decides to make his employers believe their daughter has been kidnapped and pay ransom for her return. As he needs a confederate in that venture, Bigger confides his scheme to his girl friend who reluctantly consents to join in the plot.

But the murder is discovered at an embarrassing moment, and Bigger's thoughts turn from ransom to escape. Aware that his girl friend knows he is implicated in the crime, he fears that she may betray him. To forestall that danger, he kills her—by the comparatively humane method of braining her with a brick and pitching her out of a fourth-floor window into an area way, where she freezes to death in the snow. But murder is out now. The police are on his trail and the hue and cry rises to crescendo.

In the depiction of Bigger's chase and capture the reader discovers the peak passages of the book. With delectable irony, the author describes a town gone wild. Instead of sending out two or three detectives to arrest Bigger—a force ample for the job—the police make a show of his pursuit. They deploy riot squads, get out their gas bombs, deputize swarms of special officers and conscript the aid of the fire department. The States Attorney, ham actor that he is, steps into the floodlight to announce that he will make Bigger's swift punishment a warning to other potential murderers.

While the law is making an ass of itself, the newspapers go to town plastering the community with inflammatory headlines that incite public clamor and boost circulation. As the crime is too atrocious to be exaggerated, the papers enhance its horror by embroidering it with superstitions culled from the folklore of race prejudice. The mature reader will find grim humor here. That an underprivileged boy who is none too bright should commit a senseless crime is not astonishing. That his crime could throw a huge civilized city off balance into tumultuous hysteria, making its officials and editors act the part of clowns and procurers. . . . That decreases one's respect for the "superior" race.

As Bigger is rushed inevitably to his doom, his defense is undertaken by a humanitarian lawyer, a sort of fictional Clarence Darrow or Samuel Leibowitz, who pleads that the crime is a psychological end product of race prejudice. The plea does not impress the court, nor is it likely to impress the reader who has advanced beyond the belief that race friction is a comparatively simple problem. Indeed, even the naïve reader is likely to remember the gruesome murders and the exciting chase long after he has forgotten the evils of race prejudice to which the author attributes the crime, while those who believe Negro character is essentially primitive or bestial will feel that the book confirms their opinion.

To that serious weakness one might add several minor technical flaws. Nevertheless, in point of style and general craftsmanship it is one of the strongest novels written by a Negro author.

—T. L.

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✦

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